

Tischner believed that one needed to “work on” human hope in preschoolers, students, and adults in myriad situations. “When I look back at my work as a priest and philosopher, I realize that for decades I mainly worked on human hope,”¹⁶ he once mused. One might easily be tempted to dismiss Tischner’s philosophical search for hope. Marx and Lenin made most of us cognizant of the “opium” that religion sometimes provides for those who suffer. Feminist theologians rightfully admonish those who urge us to ‘offer up our sufferings’ and ‘accept our crosses,’ while paying no attention to the material circumstances which generate suffering. Tischner, well aware of Marx, Lenin, and the real suffering that ensued from the instantiation of their ideas, refuses to root hope solely beyond this world: “We cannot talk about hope in this way! ... a repository of hope exists: ‘carry one another’s burden’, ‘you are mutually each other’s trustees of hope and from this trusteeship of hope community is created.’”¹⁷ In other words, it is the responsibility of all members of a community (the Church, for example) to strive to eradicate obstacles to hope and to foster the hope of one another.

How are we to be repositories of hope for one another? Shall we deny or denigrate the suffering of others? Is this just another proposal to ‘suffer with dignity’? As we have already seen, the “post Auschwitz, post Kołyma” philosopher does not deny the magnitude of human suffering. “We must accept the fact that our thinking falls under the judgment of the suffering human being.”¹⁸ However, Tischner makes this contention in order to critique philosophies that have failed to recognize it. He has not yet put forth any constructive proposals. Hence, the question remains, what verdict shall the high court of humanity render towards Tischner’s philosophy? The answer depends on how trenchantly he addresses the problem of suffering and whether he demonstrates that “in the very structure of humanity lies a seed of hope.”¹⁹

In a provocative essay, Tischner censures a “new messianism” that exists in Poland with regard to the suffering that Poles have endured in the last several centuries: partitions, invasion and destruction by the Nazis, and forty years of Soviet domination. In his analysis of this phenomenon, he accuses some Poles of concentrating the eyes of the world on themselves. He acerbically states “Is there something worth looking at in the world other than *my* pain? Whoever doesn’t look at my pain is a sinner!”²⁰ He goes on to say ironically:

¹⁶ Tischner and Żakowski, *Tischner czyta Katechizm*, 94.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 324.

¹⁹ “Filozofia z wnętrza metafory: Z Markiem Drwięgą, Janem Andrzejem Kłoczowskim OP i Karolem Tarnowskim, filozofami, rozmawia Jarosław Makowski.” *Tygodnik Powszechny Online*. <http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/kontrapunkt/48/makow.html>. According to Kłoczowski, this was Tischner’s goal as a philosopher.

²⁰ Tischner, *W krainie schorowanej wyobraźni*, 8.

However, one needs to ask one's self, what is the nature and meaning of the pain of the defeated such that it is worth universal consideration? There is, after all, much pain in the world. There are famines, poverty, diseases, and wars. Why should we focus on one pain, on the pain of these particular people and not others who are defeated? Because this pain is the messianic pain. It is from this pain that the emancipation of the world will come.... Messianic pain is Polish pain.²¹

While this message was delivered to Poles, it carries universal significance. Tischner asks us to swallow an unsavory dose of medicine. In an age when people often play the 'my suffering is worse than your suffering' game, Tischner's words are timely and necessary.²² Nonetheless, this precautionary word against fixating on one's own pain does not deny the need for true healing and restoration as a result of real human suffering. This admonition alone does not spawn desperately needed, life-giving hope.

On the one hand, Tischner roots hope eschatologically in the future. Following Meister Eckhart, he claims that when God reveals God's self to human beings, it is always in a partial, perhaps fleeting way. God promises to reveal God's self to us fully only in the future.²³ However, neither this stance nor his rebuke of "messianic pain" overcomes the primary problem with which Tischner must grapple. He phrased the question as follows: "The human being died' engrossed by that which it thought up itself.... Why did the human being destroy itself? Because it discovered that it cannot be good.... Can we reverse this process? Can we make a human being from a game-player?"²⁴

In other words, without denying that human beings built Auschwitz and Kołyma, took satisfaction from those monstrosities and tried to wash their hands of guilt after the fact, how can we restore faith in the human person? Eschatological hope is ultimately important for Tischner. Yet, he will not abandon the human person. Adumbrating his philosophical project, he maintains it is possible to "make a human being from a game-player" (i.e., one who views all of reality as a game to be won). This can be accomplished by "showing that from the interior of the human being's game we can extract [or call forth] a yearning for that which is truly good, a yearning that through freedom seeks a space for itself."²⁵

²¹ Ibidem.

²² I have in mind, for example, the fact that one hears attempts to quantitatively and/or qualitatively argue that the Holocaust was a more heinous crime against humanity than the institution of slavery or vice-versa. In my judgment, this is counterproductive and does not constitute a serious attempt at healing and reconciliation.

²³ Tischner and Żakowski, *Tischner czyta Katechizm*, 92.

²⁴ Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 64.

²⁵ Ibidem, 65.